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Capitalism and Popular Consumption

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Recently the French magazine *La Revue scientifique*[1] published data on the production of *margarine* in various countries. Those data were an additional reminder of the fact noticed long ago that the diet of the people deteriorates as capitalism develops.

As everyone knows, margarine is fat (from which stearine has been removed) processed by a special method. From it an artificial substance is made, known as margarine butter.

Margarine production in the principal European countries has assumed very large proportions. Germany produces 12.5 million poods of it per year, Britain, 7.5 million poods, and so on.

Margarine is cheaper than real butter. Butter is too costly for the vast majority of the population in the capitalist countries. The workers earn so little that they have to buy cheap, low-grade, substitute food products. And yet the workers are the chief consumers. There are millions of workers, and only hundreds of capitalists. And so the output of cheap substitutes is growing daily and hourly, along with the unheard-of luxury of a handful of millionaires.

The wealth of the bourgeoisie is growing. So are the poverty and want of the proletariat and of the mass of small proprietors, peasants, artisans and petty traders, who are being ruined.

Remarkably enough, margarine consumption is highest in the very countries which are particularly famous as producers of large quantities of the finest natural butter. To find out how great the consumption of margarine is, it is necessary to divide the whole amount of margarine produced in the country concerned (adding import and subtracting export) by the number of inhabitants.

It appears that the greatest consumer of margarine is Denmark—16,4 kilograms (about one pood) a year per in habitant. Next comes Norway—15 pounds, Germany—7.5 pounds, etc.

Denmark is the richest country for butter output. Danish butter—real butter—ranks among the finest grades. The world’s biggest and richest city, London (population, including that of the suburbs, about six million), prefers Danish butter to any other, and pays the highest price for it.

Danish well-to-do peasants, but above all the Danish capitalists, make a good deal of money from the butter trade. And yet Denmark is the world’s biggest consumer of substitute butter, margarine!

What is the explanation?

It is very simple. The vast majority of the Danish population, like that of any other capitalist country, consists of workers and propertyless peasants. They cannot afford real butter. Even the middle peasants in Denmark, being in need of money, sell abroad the butter they produce on their farms and buy the cheap margarine for themselves. The wealth of the Danish capitalists is growing, and so are the poverty and want of the Danish workers and peasants.

The same thing is happening here in Russia. Very long ago, some forty years back, when it became fashionable to set up cheese dairies and artels in the countryside, Engelhardt, a democratic writer, noted that the peasants, being in need of money, sold their milk and butter while their children starved to death.

That fact has been noted many times since then. Cheese production is growing, the production of milk for sale is growing, and the few well-to-do peasants and the merchants are becoming rich, while the poor become poorer still. The children of poor peasants, left without milk, die in enormous numbers. Child mortality in Russia is incredibly high.

Fairly often milk is sold to cheese dairies, from which the peasants then get *skimmed milk* for their own consumption.

The rich have the profits from growing production and trade, while the workers and peasants have margarine and skimmed milk. Such is capitalist reality, which liberal and official scholars are at such pains to embellish.